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FINAL REPORT ON WOMEN

AND

THE INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT DECADE FOR AFRICA

1. Over the past two years, the ECA women's programme undertook a number of case studies on the situation of women with regard to the Industrial Development Decade in Africa (IDDA), with the aim of discovering how women could be more effectively integrated into the development process in the Region. 1/ The case studies were done in Egypt, Nigeria, the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire and the United Republic of Tanzania, in order to capture a diversity of industrialization experiences.

2. Thus, the examples that were studied included a north African country with cultural attitudes favouring the seclusion of women but also perhaps the longest history of industrialization in the Region and a male labour shortage in some critical areas as a result of labour migration; an Anglophone west African country, the most populous and heavily industrialized of the sub-Saharan member States; a Francophone west African country heavily penetrated by multinationals and with several of the industries promoted by the first phase of the Industrial Development Decade in Africa programme, such as textiles and agro-industries, which might have significant opportunities for women; and, finally, an Anglophone Lusaka MULPOC country, relatively little industrialized, but with a strong ideology in support of basic industrialization as well as promotion of the equitable participation of women in the public sector.

3. Despite the linguistic, cultural, geographic and economic diversity of the cases, the findings revealed remarkable similarities in the situation of women in industrialization. All had a very low number of women workers in the industrial sector, using various indicators to measure their participation. Figures ranged from one to 5 percent in the respective countries of women working in the industrial labour force. As a percent of the total industrial labour force, the figures were similarly low. With variations from country to country and by particular industries, women generally comprised less than 10 percent of the industrial labour force. Their participation as a percentage of the workforce was surprisingly low, especially in the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire, even in areas such as textiles which have historically and worldwide employed large numbers of women workers, illustrating that in situations of labour surplus and high unemployment, male workers predominate even in jobs traditionally held by women.

1/ A preliminary report on the results of these studies (E/ECA/RCIWD/OAU/6) was presented to the Regional Intergovernmental Preparatory Meeting for the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women (Arusha, 1984); the four case studies in full plus an introductory essay synthesizing the major issues will be published by ECA in the second quarter of 1986 under the title Women and the Industrial Development Decade in Africa.

4. When employed in industry, women tended to be in low status, poorly paid, unskilled work subject to technological displacement, that is, when the process in which they worked became more highly mechanized, they were replaced by male workers. By definition, highly mechanized industries were capital intensive. These were almost entirely male domains because of employer perceptions that women were unable to operate heavy machines and government labour legislation prohibiting their night shift work but also because these jobs were generally unionized and better paid. Women were little represented in unions and rarely as union officials. Women worked at repetitive tasks, which employers thought male workers would find too boring, or at tasks which employers perceived as being feminine specialities because of their association with domestic work, such as cleaning.

5. Few women were in supervisory positions and even fewer in managerial positions. There were no examples found of women in top managerial positions. With the exception of Egypt which had growing numbers of women engineers, women were rarely found in technical fields, which were marked by labour shortages. Few women were in these fields because their educational backgrounds were generally deficient, particularly in scientific subjects. Here the complex factors of socialization of girls, attitudes of parents, teachers and guidance counsellors were crucial, either keeping girls from school, inhibiting their successful performance in school or guiding them away from fields in which they were labour opportunities. In addition, some of the limitations came from girls themselves, not daring to enter as apprentices in demand technical specialities. Again, only in Egypt were women moving into non-traditional occupations; here the stimulus was shortage of male labour as a result of migration.

6. Another limiting factor in women's industrial employment was the general concentration of manufacturing enterprises in urban areas, when the majority of African women lived in rural areas. Although Government efforts to improve the situation of women through protective labour legislation and requirements for provisions of social services (in Egypt and Nigeria, employers were required to provide nurseries and pre-schools when women employees exceeded a certain number) as well as maternity and lactation leave laws were certainly well meaning, they generally worked against the employment of women, especially in the private sector as employers hesitated to hire women workers because they regarded them as more costly. The costs came both from the requisite social services as well as from their absences (maternity leave, taking sick children to clinics, etc.) which hindered production schedules and lowered productivity. Some research showed that women had fewer absences than men workers, but other research generally confirmed that women's multiple roles made it extremely difficult for them to be workers on fixed schedules, affected their performance and formed a functional basis for employers discriminating against them. Their multiple roles and attendant responsibilities not only constrained them at the factory worker level but at lower and middle managerial levels as well, though here the problems were more frequently in the perceptions of employers than in reality (beliefs that married women were not interested in a career, would not move in response to a better job offer, were unable to travel on business, etc.).

7. Thus, the general picture that emerged was a rather gloomy one, giving little hope for women in modern sector manufacturing industries. Their situation was closely tied to the prevalent patterns of industrialization in the region, still largely one of import substitution, primarily producing goods for the urban elite using largely imported materials, tending toward capital intensiveness and generating low levels of employment. Little evidence was discerned, despite government policies, of moving toward export orientation and almost none towards the goal of integrated self reliance advocated both in the Lagos Plan for the Economic Development of Africa as well as in the IDDA programme. As long as African countries continue with import substitution-oriented industrialization, three will be little future for women in industry. Generating few jobs, these industries will prefer to employ men who require fewer social services, are little constrained by multiple roles and who are supported by labour unions.

8. As fertility remains high in the Region and male attitudes towards domestic responsibilities unchanged, the multiple role conflicts of women show little sign of abating. The rare instances where the industrial employment of women is encouraged, where women and entering non-traditional occupations and technical fields, seems to be limited to areas of male labour migration, a situation found only in Egypt and those southern African countries where the majority of males migrate to work in South Africa. This situation is unlikely to be duplicated in other areas.

9. However, this sketch is not the entire picture. Women wanting to participate in the industrialization of the Region have several paths open to them. The easiest and most obvious, requiring little education and few skills, is to seek jobs for which employers feel that they have special abilities. To date, however, these have been in low-skilled and low-paid jobs such as labelling, bottle cleaning and light packaging. However, many of these jobs are rapidly being displaced by technological advances. Thus, any industrialization strategy which encourages women to specialize in a particular "female occupation" within the manufacturing sector may lead to female structural unemployment due to technological substitution.

10. The other obvious path, which is not subject to technological displacement, is to seek employment in scientific and technical occupations which are still in short supply or which will have unfilled vacancies and attractive salaries as the regions industrialization becomes more sophisticated and specialized. While such jobs would be highly attractive to women, it is obvious that there are few women presently qualified for them. For women to enter these fields, the path is long and arduous and they must be prepared for it nearly from birth. Young girls will have to compete with young boys in schools; they will have to study scientific and technical subjects; they will have to avoid the pitfalls of adolescent pregnancy, early marriage and high fertility. Parental and societal attitudes will have to offer constant support. National women's organizations, through their structures, will have to co-ordinate support for young girls as they seek to advance in scientific fields and move into new areas of employment. Government programmes and policies, designed with an input from women themselves, must

encourage young girls and women in this direction. While it is a long and difficult route, it will reap rewards that will multiply themselves. The next generation of young girls will find it easier to follow the same road once there are role models available for them. It will certainly maximize the utilization of available human resources in the Region. Regrettably, because of the difficulty of the path, it is not one that can be followed by many women.

11. The area that holds the greatest promise for the employment of significant numbers of women in the industrialization of the Region is the development of small-scale enterprises, particularly in the agro-industrial sector, Firstly, this area is in line with the goals of African member States moving to self-reliance, as it serves the needs of the mass of the domestic population and calls for few imported inputs. Such industries are generally labour rather than capital-intensive and are more competitively located in the rural areas where women are the majority of the population. Women have a comparative advantage that they can exploit in the development of agro-industries because it is they who have been the Region's food processors to date. Small-scale agro-industrial enterprise work is more compatible with domestic work and family responsibilities and more flexible in its schedules than large scale industries.

12. However, even in this area, women will require massive support and training if they are not to see their traditional work displaced by increasing mechanization. Their present micro enterprises can not compete even with small scale industrial enterprises. Women must take the initiative to prepare themselves to survive amidst increasing competition. They will, in the first instance, need access to credit, one of the major areas where they have been disadvantaged. They will have to gain technical expertise; they will need to seek out apprenticeship opportunities in enterprises which can give them the necessary know how. They must come to recognize the need for collective association with other women and other workers to remove some of the constraints that presently limit their economic efforts. Women's organizations can support them by assisting women in establishing small businesses, by encouraging governmental awareness of the need to give assistance to women-owned and managed small-scale enterprises, by assisting them in gaining technical know how and providing them with full information on how they can gain access to credit.